

# An abstract of the thesis 'On Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*'

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## Introduction

The introduction of the thesis is mostly a capsule and review of the life and works of Mark Twain, with reflection from his contemporaries and colleagues. In addition, the forces, issues, and matters social and economic, that were present in the United States during the last half of the 19th century and therefore affected the writings of Mark Twain are discussed, and are further examined in the thesis.

Many of Twain's stories center upon the concept of men's obsession with money, which is also a focal point of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In addition, in his real life, Twain had a private struggle for financial success that transcended most other details and matters in his life. The introduction also makes a broader point about money and examines the attitudes of the United States as a whole at the time, commonly referred to as the Money-Lust Society. Corruption was quite common in the United States, especially in the frontier states near the Mississippi River.

## Chapter 1: Money Changes Huck's Life

This chapter looks at the transformation of Huck, a vagabond boy with simple values and at how the society of St. Petersburg views Huck after he finds fortune. Huck's reaction to that society is one of reluctance to participate and he soon takes the attitude that so much money is a source of great distress. The money deprives Huck of his liberty and involves him in society. Huck is forced to deal with greedy people he has avoided dealing with before, such as Judge Thatcher and his own father, who never

really provided any discipline or guidance for his boy—and never cared about him until Huck became rich.

The power of money is ever present in the theme, in the plot and even in the characters who are only mildly related to Huck through casual acquaintance during his journey down the river. In the novel, money is used to symbolize the corruption of the materialistic society. Money causes Huck to take his first step toward an awareness of social reality. In contrast to the beauty of the river, Twain reveals the sorrowful state of the human race by depicting their preoccupation with money. Social satire and Huck's initiation deepen simultaneously as the story develops. Most of the characters in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are by and large unscrupulous and are analyzed as such, especially such people as the King and the Duke. These two are presented as people who would do anything, except actually work, to get money. Their fraud at the same time reveals the corruption of society along the Mississippi River.

Slowly, though, it is shown that Huck learns the value of cash and its value in society, but he still retains the simple values of his previous lifestyle. This is proven in Huck's ability to thwart the plans of the King and the Duke in regard to their deception concerning the Wilks girls' inheritance. His understanding of the difficulty of obtain money prompts him to protect anybody the fraudulent two may attempt to swindle. As opposed to his previous behavior toward money, he's obviously evolving.

## Chapter 2: Jim As a Piece of Property

In addition to his satire of the money-Lust Society, Twain also intersperses his opinions concerning slavery in the narrative of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Slaves were viewed as "property," not as human beings. Jim was therefore worth a certain amount of money. Twain makes many references to price and values in monetary terms, often adding the contradiction of pious Christianity as well. By integrating slavery as an institution condoned by the Bible, the fate of a slave is no longer a moral worry, despite basic Christian ideas of the sanctity of human life. Twain uses the institution of slavery as a means of exhibiting the

moral decadence of human beings, and in order to make the condemnation explicit, he uses the money motif, and that very subtly. Every character but Huck treats Jim as a salable object whose value is to be measured in money. Those who estimate Jim's worth in money are morally corrupt. By contrast, Huck is the only character who comes to realize Jim's human value.

The relationship between Huck and Jim is also altered somewhat due to Huck's expanding economic awareness. The value of human life as life itself and the idea that life has a monetary value conflict in Huck since he and Jim were virtually a family before the changes wrought by Huck's dawning awareness of money. Huck's humanity and his economic ideals clash as Huck realizes that Jim is, in society's eyes, a piece of property, therefore stolen, therefore representing a violation of Huck's moral code. The paradox is simple: through his humanity, Huck helps Jim escape. But when the idea of Jim being property is introduced, Jim becomes stolen and Huck has in effect become a thief. Huck vacillates between natural human affection and the impersonal social views. Huck decides to help Jim free himself and chooses to go to hell as a consequence of his deed. But once Huck is accepted by the Phelps as Tom Sawyer, we cannot observe any intimate relationship between Huck and Jim.

### **Chapter 3: Tom and Huck at the Phelps Plantation**

In contrast to his friend Tom Sawyer, Huck, in showing resistance to money-centered values, suggests more questions about the role of money in society. Tom is well-adapted to a monetary society, whereas Huck must still grapple with the idea. Tom no longer is the naughty boy of the town, but becomes one of its prized citizens. Tom's adoption of the value system is painless in comparison to Huck's. Tom simply accepts the values that society has cast upon him. Tom's value system, as a consequence, becomes warped and materialistic. His game-like liberation of Jim embodies slaveholding society's hypocrisy. At the Phelps Plantation, Huck begins to refer to St. Petersburg as "home," indicating that society's values, when discovered with his friend familiar old Tom, are much more acceptable

than before. Twain produces savage satire on slavery to make Huck adjust himself to the value system of the society.

### Conclusion :

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* appears at first sight to be a pastoral novel which looks back nostalgically to an older and simpler America. But in fact Twain depicts the harsh reality of his contemporary post-Civil War world and his severe condemnation is focused on the Money-Lust Society. He has his protagonist travel with a runaway slave through the materialistic society and observe the human greed and hypocrisy in it. The novel begins and ends with Huck in possession of \$6000, only the transformation in attitudes towards value systems and society being detailed. Huck, at the beginning of the novel, being a social outcast, begins his journey as one of liberation from the bondage of society, finally comes full circle and learns to accept, for better or worse, society's codes by the end of his journey.